

New facility to process water close to approval

By Amy Oakes

STAFF WRITER

February 21, 2005

SPRING VALLEY – Construction of a \$34 million recycled-water facility, which will ensure that parks and other open spaces in eastern Chula Vista stay green even during long droughts, could begin in about four months.

This month, the Otay Water District certified the final environmental impact report for the project. The project is still under review but is expected to gain approval within the next couple of months.

The recycled-water facility, which will be north of Main Street near the Otay Landfill, is expected to be completed in early 2007. It will supply communities in eastern Chula Vista with 100 percent reclaimed water. The water will be used for landscaped areas such as parks and recreation fields.

"For the Otay Water District, this is a big deal," said Mark Watton, the agency's general manager. "It's one of the biggest projects the district has done dollar-wise."

The project calls for six miles of 30-inch-wide pipeline, a 12-million-gallon storage tank and a pump station. The pipeline stretches from Dairy Mart Road in south San Diego, through San Ysidro and to the eastern Chula Vista neighborhoods.

The fast-paced development in east Chula Vista over the past few years has increased the demand for recycled water. The district currently gets recycled water from the Ralph W. Chapman Water Recycling Facility in Rancho San Diego. That facility produces about 1.1 million gallons of recycled water a day.

On cool winter days, the Chapman facility supplies most of the recycled water for east Chula Vista. But on summer days, Watton said, the district needs 5 million more gallons a day of potable water to meet demand. And it will need even more recycled water in the future.

In October 2003, the district signed a 20-year deal with the city of San Diego to buy up to 6 million gallons of reclaimed water a day. The district will pay a \$3.6 million hook-up fee to San Diego's South Bay Water Reclamation Plant, and it will pay up to \$2 million a year for water.

The new Otay facility will process and deliver the reclaimed water, which will be used throughout east Chula Vista. The amount each day will depend on demand.

Watton said the district anticipated there would be a period when the amount of recycled water needed in east Chula Vista would exceed supply.

"We knew there would be a mismatch in time," Watton said.

The planned communities in east Chula Vista were all built with the idea of using recycled water in open-space areas. Beginning in 1986, Watton said, the district required pipes for reclaimed water to be installed for new parks, sports fields and landscaped areas.

At the time, developers were not happy about the added expense, Watton said. However, with current concerns over future water supplies and a focus on conservation, "We all look like geniuses," he said.

The new facility, which will be financed through developer fees and federal grants, had to be altered to protect Otay tar plants. The original proposed location of the storage facility would have destroyed a significant number of the plants.

After working with the city of Chula Vista, Watton said, district officials moved the storage facility's location 60 feet south to minimize the impacts on the tar plants. The change drew praise from environmental groups, Watton said.

"Having a much better relationship with the city of Chula Vista has really paid off," he said.

In past years, Chula Vista officials have been critical of the politics that have plagued the district, which serves 193,000 people in the southeastern part of the county. The 129-square-mile district includes southern El Cajon and La Mesa, Jamul, Spring Valley, Bonita, eastern Chula Vista and the San Diego neighborhood of Otay Mesa.
